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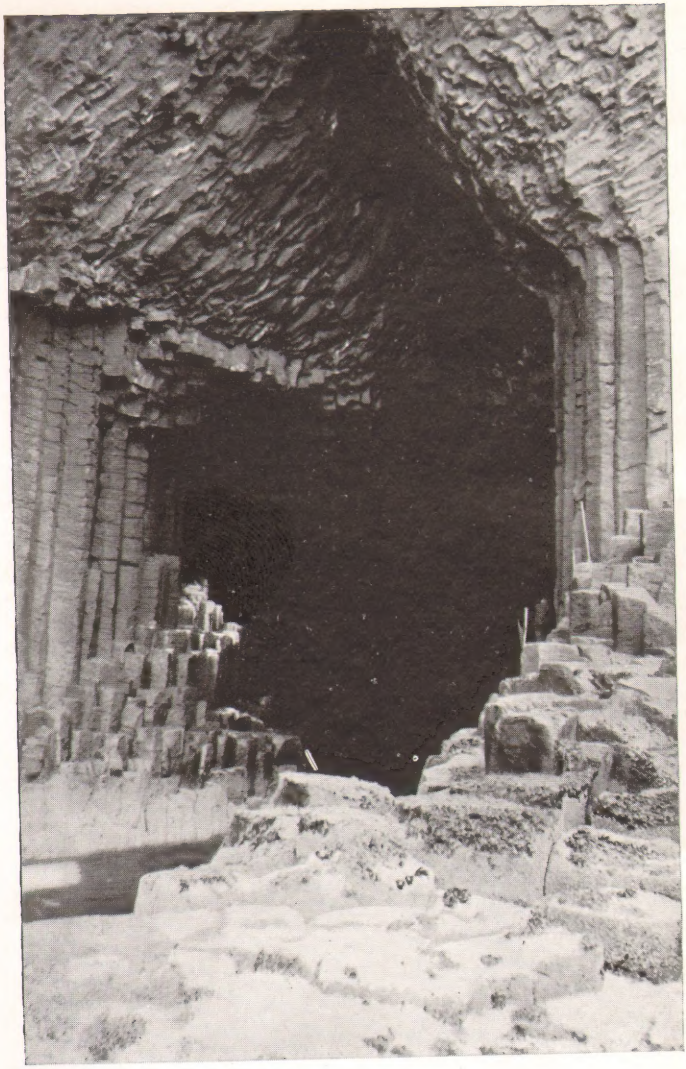
THE ISLAND OF STAFFA

BY

DONALD B. MACCULLOCH

WITH 12 PHOTOGRAPHS, TWO PLANS AND ONE MAP, BY THE AUTHOR



Entrance to Fingal's Cave, Staffa.

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PREFACE

THIS book owes its origin to a fortnight spent on the island of Staffa, during the month of June, 1922, along with my Father and Mr. Dan. Cameron, a native of Tobermory, both the latter having been landed by Messrs. MacBrayne, Ltd., the West Highland Steamship Co., for the purpose of fitting lifelines, etc., for the safety of tourists.

During our sojourn, I photographed the most interesting features of the island, and sometime afterwards was asked to publish these photographs with a description of each place of interest, but on searching for reliable information discovered that such was very scarce, and difficult to obtain. A few books contain a brief reference to the subject, but no single book has been found wholly devoted to Staffa, with the exception of a series of nine coloured Acquatint views (not strictly accurate) drawn by William Daniell, A.R.A., which, along with a brief description of Staffa, were bound together and published in 1818 at the price of £2 0s 0d per volume. Copies of this publication are now very scarce.

The sources from which the information has been obtained are many and varied, whilst fourteen years having been spent sailing on the " Staffa and Iona " route by my father has enabled me to obtain a considerable amount of oral testimony, added to what has come under my personal observation.

The written and oral information obtained having reached beyond the bounds of a single article, I have

taken it upon myself to publish same in book form, trusting that such information, along with the illustrations, may prove useful to anyone having an interest in this remarkable island, which ranks amongst the foremost of the world's natural wonders.

In compiling this book every care has been taken to procure trustworthy information.

Under these circumstances I must beg the indulgence of the reader for any shortcomings on my part.

Finally, I wish to offer my thanks to Professor J. W. Gregory, F.R.S., who occupies the chair of Geology in Glasgow University, for examining the geological parts, and to Mr. John MacCormick, F.S.A.Scot. (author of "The Island of Mull," etc.), for examining the topographical and other parts of this book.

DONALD B. MACCULLOCH.

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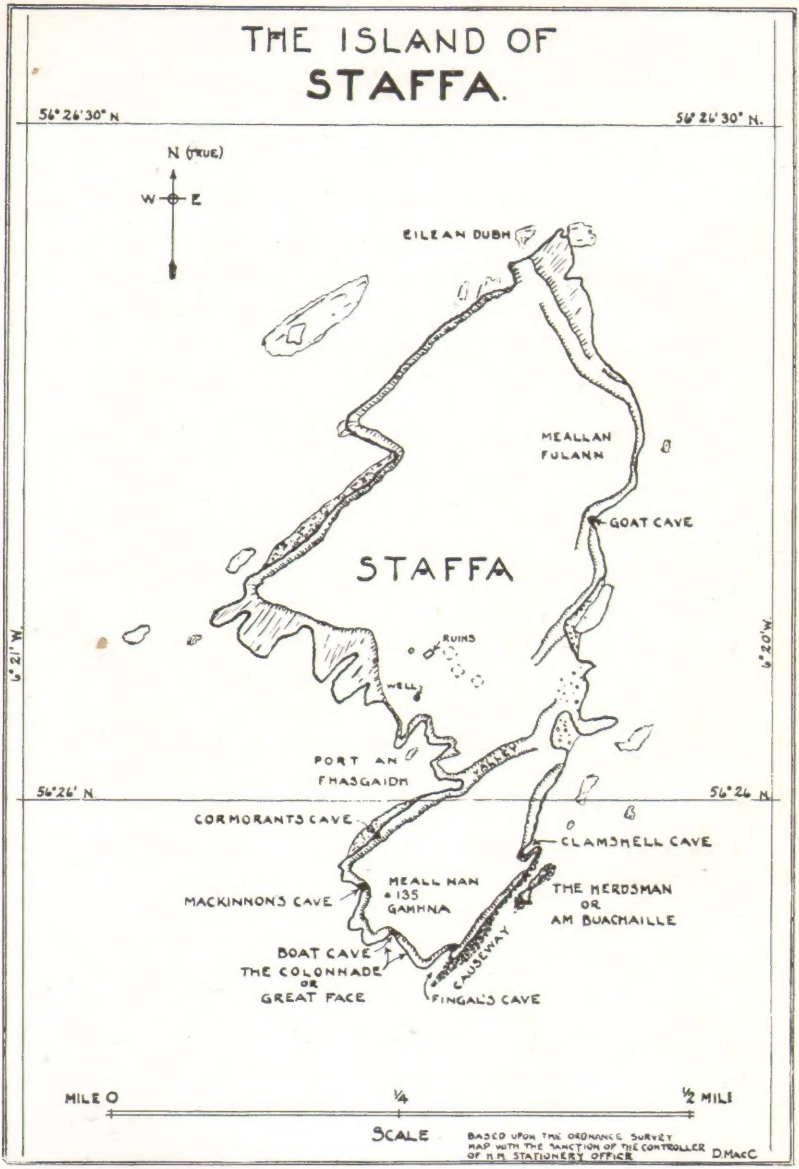
January, 1927.



A. MacLaren & Sons, Printers, Glasgow.

THE ISLAND OF STAFFA

Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY

THERE is a special attraction about a holiday spent on a small island, which is altogether absent from one spent on the mainland, even if it be at the seaside. When the island happens to be uninhabited and has so many interesting features as Staffa there is an additional charm which has to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

My curiosity to land on Staffa was heightened by the fact that at our first attempt landing was impossible, owing to the heavy swell which could be seen breaking at the foot of the cliffs and sending the white spray high into the air. However, at our second attempt we were favoured with a perfect day for landing.

Staffa is a small uninhabited island of the Inner Hebrides, lying in the Atlantic, off the west coast of Scotland, lat. 56° 26′ N., longt. 6° 20′ W., about seven miles west of the nearest point of the island of Mull, and about six miles N. by E. of Iona, lying approximately north and south. It is in the united parish of Kilninian and Kilmore, in the County of Argyll. The nearest inhabited island is Gometra, about four miles to the north-east.

Staffa is about three-quarters of a mile long by about one-quarter of a mile broad, and one-and-a-half mile in circumference, with a superficial area of seventy-one acres. Its highest elevation (about 135 feet above sea level, mean tides) is at the precipitous south end, from which point it slopes gradually down on either side, contracting

to a comparatively flat point at the extreme north end. It formerly belonged to the late Mr. John N. Forman, W.S., Edinburgh, and is now the property of his descendants.

According to the " Norse Influence in Celtic Scotland," by Dr. G. Henderson, the word Staffa is derived from the Norse words " Stafr " meaning staff, pillar or column, and " ey " meaning island, hence Stafr-ey, pillar, or column island (although at least one writer asserts that the name is derived from the Gaelic words " Stuadh Fodha," meaning underground swell). Norse place names are numerous over the whole of Mull and the surrounding islands.

Dean Munro, who toured the Hebrides in 1549, does not mention Staffa in his " Description of the Western Isles," neither does Bishop Leslie in his " History of Scotland," 1578, although the latter mentions the Treshnish Islands, which are close to Staffa. The earliest reference to the island which I have been able to locate is given in the " History of Scotland," by George Buchanan, first published in 1582. He merely states, when describing the Hebrides—" Four miles from Gometra, on the south, stands Staffa." It is surprising that M. Martin does not mention it when describing the surrounding islands in his " Description of the Western Islands of Scotland " (published in 1703). The Norse name of the island, however, shows that it was known as far back as the time of the Norwegian possessions in the Hebrides (890-1266 A.D.). Previous to this time piratical Vikings, both Danes and Norwegians, in their dreaded war galleys, periodically swept the Hebridean seas, always leaving their mark of ruin and destruction behind them.

Being in close proximity to Iona, the wonderful formation of Staffa could hardly remain unknown to the many voyagers bound for the sacred island, as for many centuries Iona has been a very important place to those of Christian faith.

Sir Joseph Banks also records that on asking his local guides for the name of Staffa's greatest cavern, it was readily given to him.

A Mr. Leach seems to have been among the first who took particular notice of Staffa; he was a native of Ireland, and being on a visit to Drimnin, in Morven, on one of his fishing excursions, he happened to go near it; being struck with the singularity of its appearance, he landed on it and examined it particularly. This was in the year 1772. A few days later Sir Joseph Banks landed at Drimnin, and Mr. Leach told him of what he had seen. It was Sir Joseph Banks who first brought the wonders of the island to the notice of the public, and he is usually referred to as the discoverer of Staffa.

When one views Staffa from a distance of even one mile nothing remarkable may be noticed. From the south-east it appears like a giant warship heading in a southerly direction. On coming closer, however, its peculiar formation appears. It is seen to be of a three-fold character, first a basement of tufa (a volcanic ash rock) from which rise, secondly, colonnades of basalt, these forming the faces of the cliffs and entrances to the most important caves; these colonnades are in turn overlaid, thirdly, by a mass of amorphous basalt.

Lofty cliffs form the greater part of the coast line, there being only a few places where a rowing boat may land with safety. The usual landing place being at the

south-east corner, but even there comparatively calm weather is required.

During the summer months, tourists are landed daily for about one hour (weather permitting), but in this brief space of time only a glimpse of the wonders of the island can be obtained. To thoroughly explore Staffa one requires to " camp out " on the island or else reside with some of the neighbouring islanders and sail or row across when the weather is favourable.

The surface of the island is composed of an irregular grassy plain which forms a rich pasturage for sheep belonging to the neighbouring islanders. There is one small spring well, which I have indicated on the map of the island, as it may prove useful to anyone landing without a supply of fresh water.

One who admires the work of Nature will be amply repaid for one's exertions by exploring this island at leisure, in fact to thoroughly appreciate the solemnity of a place like Fingal's Cave, one must visit it alone, and muse.

Should any visitor find that Staffa does not fulfil his expectations, he should remember (to quote Dr. J. MacCulloch, the geologist) " there is nothing which the imagination is not always ready to exceed. Taste and feeling were never produced at once from nothing; and to mere wonderment nothing can be wonderful enough.

But, lest he who possesses taste should be disappointed in Staffa, let him recollect the difficulty he has at first felt in appreciating the finest works of art. He will then return again and again, if it be in his power, and at every visit this extraordinary scenery will rise in his estimaton, presenting the strongest proof of merit that exists, either in the works of art or of nature."

The Colonnade, Staffa.

Showing Boat Cave (left) and Fingal's Cave (right).

Chapter II

SIR JOSEPH BANKS' DESCRIPTION OF STAFFA

AS stated in the previous chapter, Sir Joseph Banks discovered Staffa while on a natural history expedition to Iceland, in August, 1772.

Previous to this voyage, he accompanied Captain Cook, as a Naturalist, on his first voyage round the world, during the years 1768-1771. In 1778 he was elected President of the Royal Society, a position he held until his death in 1820. The following is Banks' description of his "discovery" of Staffa, which was published in the second volume of " Pennant's Tour in Scotland, or a Voyage to the Hebrides in 1772." This book was published in Dublin in 1775, and dedicated to Sir Joseph Banks :—

(Pennant in the course of his voyage to the Hebrides passed by Staffa, but was unable to land owing to the roughness of the sea. He, therefore, utilised Banks' description.)

" August 12th, 1772.

In the Sound of Mull we came to anchor, on the Morven side, opposite to a gentleman's house called Drumnen, the owner of it, Mr. MacLeane, having found out who we were, very cordially asked us ashore: we accepted his invitation and arrived at his house, where we met an English gentleman, Mr. Leach, who no sooner saw us than he told us that about nine leagues from us was an island where he believed no one even in the Highlands had been, on which were pillars like those of the Giant's Causeway; this was a great object to me who had wished

to have seen the Causeway itself, would time have allowed. I therefore resolved to proceed directly, especially as it was just in the way to Columb-kill: accordingly, having put up two days' provisions and my little tent, we put off in a boat about one o'clock for our intended voyage, having ordered the ship to wait for us in Tobirmore, a very fine harbour on the Mull side.

At nine o'clock, after a tedious passage, having had not a breath of wind, we arrived under the direction of Mr. MacLeane's son and Mr. Leach. It was too dark to see anything, so we carried our tent and baggage near the only house upon the island and began to cook our supper, in order to be prepared for the earliest dawn to enjoy that which from the conversation of the gentlemen we had now raised the highest expectations of.

The impatience which everybody felt to see the wonders we had heard so largely described, prevented our morning rest; everyone was up and in motion before the break of day, and with the first light arrived at the south-east part of the island, the seat of the most remarkable pillars: where we no sooner arrived than we were struck with a scene of magnificence which exceeded our expectations, though formed as we thought upon the most sanguine foundations; the whole of that end of the island is supported by ranges of natural pillars mostly above fifty feet high, standing in natural colonnades according as the bays or points of land formed themselves; upon a firm basis of unformed rock, above these the stratum which reaches to the soil or surface of the island varied in thickness as the island itself formed into hill or valley, each hill which hung over the columns below forming an ample pediment; some of these above sixty feet in thickness from the base to the point, formed by the

sloping of the hill on each side almost into the shape of those used in architecture.

Compared to this what are the cathedrals or the palaces built by man? mere models or playthings, imitations as diminuative as his works will always be when compared with those of nature. Where is now the boast of the Architect? regularity, the only part in which he fancied himself to exceed his Mistress. Nature is here found in her possession, and here it has been for ages undiscovered.*

Is not this the school where the art was originally studied, and what has been added to this by the Grecian school? a capital to ornament the columns of nature, of which they could execute only a model, and for that very capital they were obliged to a bush of Acanthus: how amply does nature repay those who study her wonderful works.

With our minds full of such reflections we proceeded along the shore, treading upon another giant's causeway, every stone being regularly formed into a certain number of sides and angles, till in a short time we arrived at the mouth of a cave, the most magnificent, I suppose, that has ever been described by travellers."

(The description of Fingal's Cave as given by Sir Joseph Banks will be found in Chapter V., which is devoted wholly to this cave.)

*Staffa is taken notice of by Buchanan, but in the slightest manner, and among the thousands who have navigated these seas, none have paid the least attention to its grand and striking characteristics till the present year.

Chapter III

HOW STAFFA WAS FORMED

THE first question one feels inclined to ask when viewing Staffa is "How was the island formed?" This question has been answered in various ways, some theories credible, others quite incredible.

A local legend tells us that a great giant, whose name was Torquil MacLeod and whose home was in the island of Eigg, while one day doing some work at the Giant's Causeway, in north-east Ireland, decided to take a piece of the Causeway home with him. He chose the best piece he could find—Staffa—and putting it in a sack slung it over his shoulder and set out for home, wading across the sea, but when passing the island of Mull the weight of the rock caused it to penetrate the sack and a few small pieces fell out, these are supposed to be the small rocks which lie to the south-west of Staffa. On observing this the giant hastened to reach the nearest land, which was the island of Ulva, but alas! the sack burst and Staffa splashed into the sea. Being so tired and angry Torquil left it where it lay.

The modern theory of geologists is that Staffa is a detached remnant of the volcanic rocks which are so extensive in Mull, of which Staffa was once a part. Beautiful examples of columnar structure are found in Mull and several of the surrounding islands, in fact, had Staffa not existed the neighbouring island of Ulva might have become famous for its examples of this form of rock.

During the Early and Middle parts of the geological Era known as the Kainozoic or Tertiary (before man had made his appearance on the earth) violent volcanic activity took place in many parts of the earth, which caused them to assume, more or less, their present configuration. In Europe during the middle part of this Era enormous floods of basaltic rock, in a molten condition, welled out through various parts of the earth's crust, overflowed and covered the older rocks for many hundreds of square miles. The most important of these floods is that of which the remnants now occupy a large part of north-east Ireland and in disconnected areas extend through the Inner Hebrides and the Faroe Islands into Iceland, Jan Mayen and east Greenland. These areas are remnants of a great basaltic plateau which is considered by many authorities to have stretched from Ireland to Iceland, and are known as plateau lavas.

Professor A. Lacroix, the famous French Mineralogist, has found the basalts of Antrim, Mull, Skye and Iceland to be similar.

According to most geologists, this volcanic activity accompanied the breaking up and foundering of a large part of the great Thulean continent of North Atlantis, which, in pre-Kainozoic times, connected Scandinavia and Scotland to Greenland and Canada. The foundering of this land formed the North Atlantic Ocean.

Scandinavia, Scotland, Iceland, Greenland and the eastern half of Canada are remnants of the North Atlantis continent, the whole of which was not necessarily above sea level at the same time, but most of it has been very often land, and some parts of it have probably never been submerged by the sea.

Geologists have come to the conclusion that the Mull lavas were poured out on a dry land surface of Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks.

Much evidence is obtained for ascribing these basaltic floods to the Middle* part of the Kainozoic Era from fossil plant beds found between the lava flows at Ardtun, Mull and elsewhere, and as the Middle Kainozoic Era is, geologically, very recent, Staffa may be said to be of comparatively modern formation, although it is worthy of note that the neighbouring island of Iona is composed of pre-Cambrian (Lewisian and Torridonian) rocks, among the oldest known rocks in the earth's crust.

Some readers may wish to know how many thousands, or millions, of years have elapsed since the middle of the Kainozoic Era (i.e., since Staffa was formed), but the answer depends upon what figure the reader believes to be the total age of the earth. The most recent estimates of the earth's age, based upon the modern study of radio-activity, which is considered by the majority of scientists to be the most accurate method, range from one thousand million years to two thousand million years. For our purpose a mean of these figures is perhaps best. This gives the earth an age of one thousand five hundred million years. The Kainozoic Era constitutes the last five per cent. of the earth's geological duration and, therefore, according to our estimate of the earth's age, commenced about seventy-five million years ago. Considering Staffa as having been formed during the middle of the Kainozoic Era, we find its age to be

*The Scottish Geological Survey Memoirs ascribe these basaltic floods to the *Early* Tertiary (or Kainozoic) Era, but this view has been rejected for areas where the evidence is much fuller than for Scotland. The Early Kainozoic Era had a tropical flora with palms, etc.; the fossil plants of Mull indicate a much colder climate, more in keeping with the Middle Kainozoic Era.—D. MacC.

somewhere about thirty-seven and a half million years, but as the age of the earth is extremely difficult to calculate this figure for the age of Staffa may vary greatly and is given merely for the benefit of readers who are not satisfied with such expressions as:—" Staffa was formed in the remote past," " Staffa was formed an infinitely long time ago," etc.

The rock of which Staffa is composed is a dark greyish black, fine-grained basalt which becomes a rusty brown on weathering, but decomposes no further.

A brief reference to the geology of Mull is necessary here, as it is hardly possible to describe the geology of Staffa without referring to the geology of Mull, otherwise it would be like describing the branch of a tree without mentioning the stem from which it grew.

During the earth changing period already referred to, the island of Mull was one of the principal volcanic centres, and, according to the evidence of modern geological survey, the island includes the most complicated extinct volcanic centre as yet accorded detailed examination anywhere in the world. It presents almost every conceivable type of eruption in its lavas, agglomerates and intrusions, and its volcanic activity appears to have been of unusual longevity.

The mountains of Mull are remnants, not of several volcanoes, but of one immense volcano, which at a modest estimate was over ten thousand feet high. Its centre was situated in the locality of Loch Ba.

Every evidence found in the Mull area indicates that the plateau lavas were poured out, at intervals, with a minimum of explosive activity, and the occurrence of sedimentary material, including coal and leaf beds, with well-preserved terrestial vegetation between some of the

basalt sheets, shows that considerable intervals sometimes occurred between successive outflows of lava. Fifty feet is the average thickness of an individual flow, but the total thickness of all the flows amounts to thousands of feet.

When considering Staffa, one should bear in mind that it was not always an island, but was originally a small part of the Mull section of the great basaltic plateau already referred to. It is now an island because great portions of the surrounding land have disappeared through various causes, such as denudation, disruption and subsidence from subterranean movements; but the main form of the district was determined by erosion before the onset of the Pleistocene Ice Age. Any effect these glacial conditions had has been almost undone by a comparatively recent elevation of this land.

The pre-Glacial and post-Glacial raised beaches, which appear in this district, clearly indicate that the land has emerged from the sea.

One of the most impressive lessons which geologists have derived from their study of Mull is the immensity of the erosion that has affected the district since the extinction of its volcanic fires. Moreover, it has been dislocated by many faults by which different portions have been greatly shifted in level. At the present time Mull is so penetrated by sea lochs and so divided by deep valleys that a comparatively slight depression would turn it into a group of islands.

The average visitor is inclined to regard Staffa as an isolated specimen of columnar structure having no relation to the surrounding district, but this is a mistaken idea. To fully realise how Staffa was formed, the visitor, while exploring the island, should look across to the

Columnar Formation.

South East Corner of Staffa.

Mull coast, especially towards Burg (a headland south-east of Staffa), and he will there observe, if the weather be clear enough, that the outline of the landscape rises in a series of steps, or trap terraces. Each of these terraces is composed of an individual lava flow similar to the one so clearly seen at the south end of Staffa. Burg may, therefore, be said to be composed of many Staffas, piled on top of one another.

Conversely, if several Staffas were piled on top of the existing one, we should have a representation of the Mull Coast as it appears at Burg and many other parts.

From the above it will be realised that the underwater portion of Staffa is, in all probability, a repetition of the formation seen above water.

That movements subsequent to the formation of the plateau have taken place is shown by the inclination of some of the basaltic sheets, of which Staffa is an excellent example. This inclination of Staffa causes the actual top of the Fingal's Cave lava to be at sea level near the north end of the island, the overlying rock being the base of another lava flow. This Fingal's Cave lava flow, which has rendered Staffa famous, is regarded as lying near the base of the lava flows of Mull, considered as a whole. This means that when these basaltic floods had reached their zenith, Staffa, and the surrounding scenery, now laid bare, were covered with a mass of lavas, the surface of which was many hundreds of feet above the present surface of Staffa.

The lava at Fingal's Cave is generally divisible into a lower zone of massive regular columns, a middle zone of close spaced wavy columns and a top zone of slaggy lava, but there is no distinct line of separation between

the two zones of columns. The wavy columns denote rapid cooling while the lava was flowing.

The basement of volcanic tufa seen below the range of columns at the colonnade, and elsewhere, was formed by the eruption of ashes and stones during intervals between the successive outflows of basalt.

Considerable discussion has arisen as to the way in which the columnar formation of the rock composing Staffa, and elsewhere, has been produced. It is due to the shrinkage of the molten material on solidification and cooling. It began on the upper and lower surfaces, and extended upwards and downwards into the mass as solidification and cooling proceeded.

When a mass is subjected to a uniform strain, according to the law of least resistance, it tends to assume this prismatic structure. Since, at any point on a surface, three breaks radiating from a centre, form the least number of breaks that will relieve a strain that pulls in all directions (as does the strain in cooling lavas), a combination of these breaks results in the formation of hexagons which run through the entire mass of lava. Many igneous rocks (i.e., rocks which have consolidated from a molten condition) present this mode of jointing, but the structure reaches its most perfect development in basalt.

In this rock, the columns, which are often very long and regular, are bounded by three, four, five or six planes producing triangular, quadrangular, pentagonal and hexagonal prisms.

In rocks having a very homogenous texture, such as Staffa, the six sided* prisms are the most prevalent, for

*Columns having more, or less, than six sides are the result of irregular spacing of the contraction centres, caused by these parts of the rock not having a perfectly uniform composition. —D. MacC.

in this case the centres of contraction (through loss of heat and water) are equidistant and the angles of the prisms fit together without any intervening empty space (a common example of cracking into prismatic formation, owing to loss of moisture, can be seen in drying mud, or drying starch).

The long axis of the columns has been shown to be perpendicular to the surface at which the greatest cooling took place. In accordance with this law, the columns are usually vertical in horizontally bedded lavas, as at Staffa. Occasionally the columns are subdivided into a series of superimposed tablets by a subsidiary cross jointing.

Mr. Mallet, the geologist, has said that all the salient phenomena of the prismatic and jointed structure of basalt can be accounted for upon the admitted laws of cooling, and contraction thereby, of melted rock possessing the known properties of basalt, the essential conditions being a very general homogenity in the mass cooling, and that the cooling shall take place slowly, principally from one or more of its surfaces.

A simple experiment to explain this mode of jointing can be performed by squeezing a number of cigarettes together in the hand; each one will become flattened where it touches another and thus the inner ones will become six-sided. It is a similar cause which makes bee-cells hexagonal; the bees all start together as near as convenient, and each one tries to build a round cell; but each cell comes into contact with six others and acquires six sides by pressure. (Many parts of Staffa strongly represent a honeycomb by the six-sided pattern of the columns.) If instead of pressure throughout the mass (as in the case of the cigarette) we imagine an

evenly distributed stretching or tension, each particle drawing its immediate neighbour towards itself, it is easy to imagine that something quite similar will follow, and evenly distributed hexagons will form on the cooling surface, packed together so as to occupy the whole space.

Similar conspicuous columnar structure to that seen at Staffa is found in the Giant's Causeway, north-east Ireland, but after exploring these two parts I found that the superficial impressions received differed mainly in the fact that while the columns composing the various parts of the Giant's Causeway stand, more or less, vertical, those composing Staffa can be found standing and lying in every conceivable position.

Geologists consider the basalts to be discharged from a wide spread layer deep in the earth's crust and therefore the reservoirs which fed the eruptions in north-east Ireland had probably some connection with those which fed the eruptions in Mull, but there would appear to be no submarine connection at the present time between Staffa and the Giant's Causeway, as has been alleged by various non-scientific writers. Any connection which existed has disappeared through denudation, etc.

It should be borne in mind that the columnar structure shows up to advantage at Staffa and the Giant's Causeway, because the former, being an island, and the latter a seacoast promontory, the ocean waves have washed away any loose material which might have hidden their most perfect parts had they formed inland. These two places are usually regarded as classical examples of columnar structure, although this formation of rock occurs in many of the world's volcanic regions.

Clamshell Cave, Staffa.

Chapter IV

DESCRIPTION OF CAVES, ETC.

THE precipitous coast line of Staffa contains many caves, but only the five most important have been named; these are:—

1. Clamshell, or Scallop, Cave.
2. Fingal's Cave.
3. Boat Cave.
4. MacKinnon's Cave.
5. Cormorant's, or Scart's, Cave.

On the Government survey map of Staffa, there is one cave marked "Goats' Cave," but on making enquiries I found that only a few of the local people have heard of this cave being so named.

As "Clamshell Cave" is probably the best known landing place on the island, I will make it a starting point for a description of the coast line travelling in a clockwise direction.

Surely nothing more remarkable in rock formation than Clamshell Cave can be seen anywhere. One side of this cave is formed by columns of rock bent into a wonderful formation resembling a clamshell or the ribs of a wooden ship. The opposite (north) side is formed by the projecting ends of columns, giving a formation which strongly resembles a honeycomb. This cave has a very striking appearance, but is too much of the bizarre to be described as picturesque.

One theory of the peculiar columnar formation seen here is that when an upper system of close spaced wavy columns (caused by the rapid irregular cooling of the upper surface) meets with the more massive and straight

system of columns (caused by the slow regular cooling of the lower surface) instead of coalescing they, *sometimes*, bend abruptly into rough parallelism.

Owing to its shape it is rather difficult to decide where the cave actually begins, but the following measurements will give an approximate idea of its size.

Length inward, 130 feet.
Height, 30 feet.
Breadth, 16 or 18 feet.

This cave is well sheltered from the sea, and is therefore one of the best landing places, having a small pebble beach with the broken columns on either side forming a natural landing stage.

Proceeding southwards along the water's edge, a small island, or rather rock, composed of columns without any stratum over them, is seen on the left. It is called " The Herdsman " or " Am Buachaille," to give it its Gaelic name, the highest point being about thirty feet above sea level. This rock may have derived its name from the fact that it herds back the heavy seas which roll in from the south, thus adding to the safety of landing at Clamshell Cave. (Southerly and south-westerly winds are the most prevalent here.) The name Herdsman is often applied, in the Scottish Highlands, to solitary rocks or islands which seem to keep guard over the surrounding ground like a shepherd over his flock.

" The Herdsman," which is separated from Staffa by a narrow channel about fifteen feet broad, is wonderful enough when seen from sea level, but it has to be viewed from the top of the cliffs, which form the coast line of Staffa, to fully realise its complex formation. The columns are seen dispersed in every direction, and at one part appear like logs of driftwood piled on top of one

another. At high water the sea divides "The Herdsman" into two parts. The northerly part has a conical formation, its columns converging towards an imaginary apex. The southerly part has the majority of its columns laid flat, the ends exposed towards Staffa showing a beautiful packed formation.

In the cliffs of Staffa, opposite the south end of "The Herdsman," there is a peculiar formation in the rock, resembling a large chair, set into a niche in the cliff. This is known as "Fingal's Wishing Chair," and tradition says that one has only to sit here and wish three separate wishes to have them all granted.

Passing onwards one traverses "the Causeway " formed by the upper ends of broken columns, some of these ends being concave, others convex, this forms the ball and socket joints of the standing columns. These horizontal joints are clearly seen in many of the vertical columns and prove by their formation that tremendous force is required to dislodge them. This is the best place to observe the numerous sizes and shapes of the columns, the majority are five or six-sided, but many exceptions to these are found, some having as many as nine sides, while one, at least, near Fingal's Cave is practically square. They vary from two to three feet six inches in diameter.

Proceeding along the causeway what is known as the " Bending Columns " come into view. These columns, which form the cliffs at this part of the island, are bent, or arched, at the tops, this being due probably to the rapid, irregular cooling of the upper surface when the rock was formed.

Not many yards beyond the "Bending Columns" is " Fingal's Cave," but as the next chapter is devoted to a full description of this great cavern, I will here pass it by.

To explore the remaining coast line, a boat is required, as, with the exception of a few small creeks, and a few hundred yards at the north-west corner, the cliffs rise sheer from a narrow rocky platform at sea level.

After leaving Fingal's Cave, in a boat, the "Colonnade," or "Great Face," appears on the right. This is an extensive range of long regular columns which rise from near sea level. The average length of these columns is fifty-five feet, and at first sight they seem to be fitted into one another as if to form an effective prop for the solid mass of rock resting on them. These cliffs appear from close inspection to rise perpendicularly from the sea, but as far as can be decided from photographs, which have the horizon line level, they fall back at an angle of about seven degrees from the vertical. This inclination of the "Colonnade" cliffs is caused by these columns being perpendicular to the plane of the bed of rock above, and as this plane dips from south to north it follows that they have the same inclination from the vertical as the plane of the bed has to the horizon. The highest point of the colonnade is 112 feet above high water mark, this point being situated between Fingal's Cave and Boat Cave.

Many people may visit Staffa without noticing that the island is inclined because it is only from the S.S.W. that the inclination is conspicuous.

There is a small cave at sea level scooped out in the lower strata of the "Colonnade" known as the Boat Cave, as it can only be entered by means of a boat. The dimensions of this cave are:—

Length inward, 150 feet.
Height, 14 feet (above high water).
Breadth at entrance, 12 feet.

The North Part of "The Herdsman" as seen from the Top of Staffa.

There is nothing remarkable about this cave, but somehow when viewed from a distance it seems to add a finishing touch to the cliffs, as if it were an entrance to this great facade of columns.

After rounding the "Colonnade," Mackinnon's Cave opens out in the cliffs; the first noticeable feature here is the numerous sea birds which are seen on every ledge of rock during the nesting season. This magnificent cave is almost as large as Fingal's Cave and, although the columnar formation is less conspicuous, would have won renown had the latter cave not existed. After noting the basaltic columns at the entrance, and the remarkable hooded formation over same, the most striking feature is the flatness of the roof, which, although slightly inclined from the horizontal, presents a surface as flat as that of many a dwelling-house, and slight markings might easily be taken to represent the impressions made by the plasterer's trowel, the walls glistening with dripping moisture complete a really wonderful sight.

This cave derives its name from the principal character in the, now almost forgotten, poem "The Abbot MacKinnon," by James Hogg ("The Ettrick Shepherd"). The poem is founded on an ancient Hebridean legend.

Here is a brief outline, with quotations, of the story as told by Hogg in his poem:—

Abbot MacKinnon, Abbot of Iona, having intrigued with "Matilda of Skye," thus breaking his monastic vows and violating the sacred traditions of Iona, was visited, in a dream, by St. Columba, who told him:—

> "The cycle was closed, and the period run.
> He had vowed to the sea, he had vowed to the sun,
> If in that time rose trouble or pain
> Their homage must pay to the God of the main."

The Abbot was so impressed by the dream that he felt compelled to fulfil St. Columba's vow. So he collected the monks the Saint had named, and, according to instructions, sailed for Staffa, where they could seek forgiveness in solitude.

" Up rose the Abbot, up rose the morn,
Up rose the sun from the bens of Lorne;
And the bark her course to the northward framed,
With all on board that the Saint had named."

On arriving at Staffa they landed at Clamshell Cave,

" Then awed to silence, they trod the strand,
Where furnaced pillars in order stand,
All formed of the liquid burning levin,
All bent like the bow that spans the heaven."

From here they walked over the causeway to Fingal's Cave, and there burned incense and offered up fervent prayers of forgiveness, but a loud voice from the cave was heard saying, " Greater yet must the offering be." Alarmed at this, they returned over the causeway, climbed to the top of the island and crossed over to the cliffs in which MacKinnon's Cave is excavated. As they proceeded northwards a small bay* at the foot of cliffs came into view.

" A little bay lies hid from sight,
O'er hung by cliffs of dreadful height."

While looking down from the cliffs they saw a mermaid sitting on a boulder in the bay, and as they listened they heard her sing a song which foretold the fate of Abbot MacKinnon. In despair, they rushed back to their boat, but on reaching the boat they found an old man, with long grey beard, sitting in the bow chanting—

" Oh, woe is me,
But great as the sin must the sacrifice be."

He seemed to be a supernatural being, and on being asked what he wanted, made no reply. The Abbot thought the old man's face reminded him of St. Columba.

*Port an Fhasgaidh.

As they pushed off from the island, with the old man still sitting in the bow, the storm which had been gathering suddenly burst, and before the gale had driven them far from Staffa, the old man rose up, and, stretching out his arms to Heaven, cried "Now is the time." At that moment a squall struck the boat, swamping it and drowning Abbot MacKinnon and his companions.

According to the traditions of the neighbouring islanders, Abbot MacKinnon, the last Abbot of Iona, took refuge in this cave for a short time after having been forced to leave Iona during a religious feud. Finding that the cave, or probably the whole island, did not offer much shelter, he sailed across to Mull, and landed at a place called Gribun, where he spent some time in a cave there, which was also named after him. A footnote in Boswell's "Johnson's Tour to the Hebrides," states that "this cave at Gribun derives its name from a gentleman the name of MacKinnon, who entered the cave for exploration purposes but never returned." The first theory seems the more feasible.

The principal dimensions of MacKinnon's Cave are:—

Length inward, 224 feet.
Height, 50 feet.
Breadth, 48 feet.

A short distance north of MacKinnon's Cave there is the Cormorants' Cave, so named from the numerous cormorants which nestle here. This cave may be entered at low tide without the use of a boat. Most references to Staffa state that MacKinnon's cave and the Cormorants' Cave are one and the same, but the natives of Gometra (the nearest inhabitants to Staffa) informed me that they and their ancestors have always recognised them as two

different caves, and pointed each one out to me. Cormorants' or Scarts' (from the Gaelic word "Sgarbh," meaning Cormorant) Cave does not rival Fingal's or MacKinnon's Cave in size, but it is more deserving the name of cave than Boat Cave. During our fortnight's stay we saw comparatively few cormorants near MacKinnon's Cave, but saw them continually entering and leaving Cormorants' Cave. Our shelter looked directly towards the latter cave. The principal dimensions of Cormorants' Cave are:—

Length, 100 feet.
Height, 25 feet (mean tide).
Breadth, 18 feet.

About half way into this cave, and on the right-hand side, a dark, narrow tunnel branches off. This winding, draughty and slippery subway, which is about thirty feet long and about two feet broad by six feet high, if followed, leads one into MacKinnon's Cave, but cannot be described as forming the two caves into one. It is not an extension of the caves, but merely a "branch off" at right angles. This is perhaps the best way to make one's first acquaintance with MacKinnon's Cave, as, after emerging from the darkness of the tunnel, the great entrance to the cave, fully lit by daylight, makes a lasting impression on one's mind.

With the exception of Fingal's Cave, all the caves on Staffa have a stony beach at the inner end at low tide.

After leaving Cormorants' Cave, proceeding northwards, a small bay, Port an Fhasgaidh (meaning the shelter bay) appears ahead. The higher part of this beach forms the entrance to a small valley which runs across the island at an oblique angle and almost cuts it in two.

MacKinnon's Cave, Staffa.

Looking out.

Continuing the journey round the island numerous caves may be seen, but they call for no special mention, and might remain unknown to anyone on Staffa, till a heavy sea rises, and then their echoes, as the waves strike their inner recesses, sound like a battery of big guns.

After passing the aforementioned small beach, the striking columnar formation dies away and does not appear, to any extent, till one arrives near to the opposite end of the valley (after circling the north part of the island), when the stratum seems to have an inclination to the bent form of pillars which presently appear.

The caves of Staffa are considered to owe their origin to the action of the sea, but the inclination of the rock has probably got something to do with the origin of Fingal's and the Clamshell Cave. The latter cave is extremely well protected from the action of the sea by natural breakwaters, and also, is on the sheltered side of the island, namely the east.

With the exception of a few small creeks, no loose stones or seaweed are found round the coastline. The heavy Atlantic swell washes every part of the rock bare of any loose material.

The magazine of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, for October, 1887, contains a paper entitled "The Caves of Staffa," by Mr. Cope Whitehouse, M.A., F.Am.G.S., in which he claims that the caves of Staffa were not formed by the forces of nature, but by the hand of man.

At least two writers assert that Mr. Whitehouse claimed the whole of the island of Staffa to have been built by man, but this is probably because they had received an inaccurate report of his paper from some second-hand source. Mr. Whitehouse made no such claim. What he did

claim was, the formation of the *caves* to human agency. (Quite a sufficiently startling theory in itself.)

The following is a brief summary of Mr. Whitehouse's paper:—

"Refugees from Syria took ship to remote colonies, some of them probably having reached the west coast of Scotland.

Staffa was precisely the spot which a Tyrian or a Carthaginian would select for a fortress owing to its situation in the centre of the great bay formed by Mull and the Treshnish Isles.

This fortress to protect Iona, which was the seat of learning and culture.

The excavation of the largest caves was commenced at the surface of the island, and after piercing the overlying amorphous rock the columns were loosened and extracted. (The rock-hewn temples of Petra and Abu-Simbel were commenced at the top.)

The caves were formed to act as shelters and hiding places for the long Phœnician galleys, break-waters being built to protect the entrance of each cave." (Tyre, Sidon and Ravenna are no longer harbours.)

A few of his arguments against the caves having been formed by the action of the sea:—

"The Treshnish Isles and Iona break the Atlantic swell before it reaches Staffa, hence there is no exceptional force in the seas which strike the island.

Fingal's Cave is wider above sea level than below it.

Columnar basalt under the action of the sea forms a causeway, not a cave.

If formed by the sea loose drums of basalt would have gathered and formed a breakwater, before the caves were properly commenced.

A force sufficient to pulverise the basalt would have destroyed the island, certainly the eastern wall of Fingal's Cave.

There is no yielding of roof in the columnar basalt above Boat Cave."

Several of the points put forward by Mr. Whitehouse in the latter part of his theory are undoubtedly correct, but many more convincing proofs will require to be given before anyone will accept a theory which attributes the formation of the caves of Staffa to the work of man, but before criticising Mr. Whitehouse's theory too severely, one should bear in mind that when he first put forward his theory for harnessing the waters of the Nile, to prevent famines in Egypt, it was looked upon as fantastic. We now know the harnessing of the Nile to be an accomplished fact at Assuan.

Chapter V

FINGAL'S CAVE

FINGAL'S Cave is probably the most remarkable feature of Staffa and must be seen to be fully appreciated. It would indeed be difficult to find the equal of this great cavern, which at first sight appears to have been hewn out of the solid rock by skilled craftsmen. The architectural regularity of its entrance bears some resemblance to a Gothic arch.

" It requires no previous knowledge and no preparation of the memory, or the imagination, to be impressed by Fingal's Cave. I have heard well-travelled men declare that nothing they had ever seen in any part of the world had ever produced such an effect upon them. There are many larger caverns—there are many more lofty cliffs, but there is nothing, anywhere, like that great Hall of Columns standing round their ocean floor and sending forth in ceaseless reverberations the solemn music of the waves. This is a scene which appeals to every eye, which all can understand and which none are likely to forget." (" Iona " by the Duke of Argyll.)

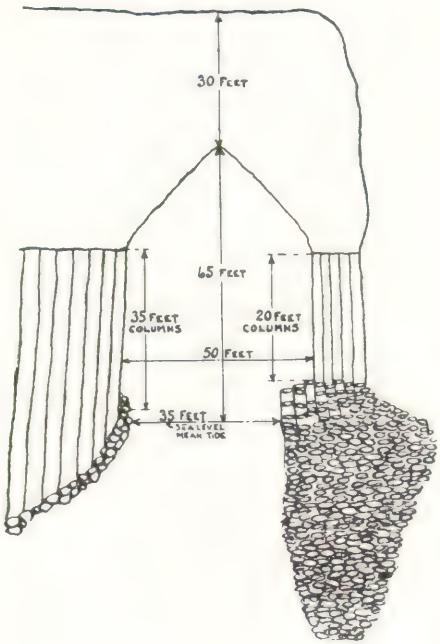
Although the rock itself is of a drab colour, in suitable atmospheric conditions, the light is reflected from one surface to another and underwater sparkles on the varied hues of lichens, giving a variety of colour difficult to beat.

The principal dimensions of Fingal's Cave are :—Height from sea level, at mean tide, to apex of arch, 65 feet.

From apex of arch to top of cliff above, 30 feet.

ELEVATION OF ENTRANCE TO FINGAL'S CAVE, STAFFA.

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE.



MEASUREMENTS TAKEN AT MEAN TIDE

D. MacC.

Breadth of entrance, 50 feet.

Distance from entrance to innermost part, 230 feet.

The plans of Fingal's Cave which I have drawn specially for this book give detailed dimensions of the cave.

The depth of water at the entrance is about 25 feet, and about 15 feet at the inner end, mean tide. There is a rise and fall of seven or eight feet at neap tides and about 12 feet at spring tides.

Sir Joseph Banks' description of the cave on first discovering it, is as follows:—"The mind can hardly form an idea more magnificent than such a place, supported on each side by ranges of columns! and roofed by the bottom of those which have been broken off to form it; between the angles of which a yellow stalagmitic matter has exuded, which serves to define the angles precisely; and at the same time vest the colours with a great deal of elegance and to render it still more agreeable, the whole is lighted from without, so that the furthest extremity is very plainly seen from without, and the air within being agitated by the flux and reflux of the tides, is perfectly dry and wholesome, free entirely from the damp vapours with which natural caverns in general abound.

We asked the name of it. Said our guide, 'the cave of Fhinn.' 'What is Fhinn?' said we. 'Fhinn MacCool, whom the translator of Ossian's works has called Fingal.'"

The columns forming the entrance to Fingal's Cave at first sight appear to be perpendicular, but from the photograph looking out of the cave it will be seen that they are inclined from the perpendicular (the photograph has the horizon level).

With a southerly or south-westerly wind the heavy swell of the Atlantic rushing in, strikes the innermost parts of the cave with a roar like thunder, which, together with the numerous echoes formed, can sometimes be heard on Mull, seven miles distant.

We visited this cave one evening at high water in spring tides, a stiff south-westerly wind blowing, and a heavy sea running, a rather dangerous undertaking, but were amply rewarded by the spectacle of these tremendous forces at work. The scene was awe-inspiring, the noise, as each sea crashed into the cave, being terrific.

The extent of the commotion at the entrance to the cave may be imagined from the fact that the salt sea was lashed into a lather-like spume, which was torn from the sea surface and spattered on the surrounding rocks by every gust of wind. This froth was not a temporary effervescence which dissolved in a few minutes, but was thick as cream and clung to the rocks till washed off by the sea. It was noticeable that although these heavy seas swept the ' causeway ' and ' the Herdsman,' at no part was this thick froth formed except at Fingal's Cave, this shows the awful turmoil which takes place here with a strong south-westerly wind blowing.

As the above description refers to a very moderate gale during early summer, one can realise that the scenes which must take place at Fingal's Cave during a mid-winter hurricane pass human comprehension.

There is a diversity of opinion as to how Fingal's Cave was formed, some maintain that it was formed by the action of the sea as most other sea coast caves are formed, but another theory put forward is that the tilt of the surrounding rock was the original cause of it, the action of the sea having only been a subsidiary cause.

Professor J. MacLean, who examined the cave on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution, and submitted a report to that society in 1887, states that the conclusions he arrived at as regards the forming of Fingal's Cave are:—

" (a) The dip of the rock of the island of Staffa indicates that there must have been a disturbance after the basalt had been deposited, which must have produced more or less crevices in the rocks.

(b) The action of the water has made a large excavation under and in the basaltic tufa (which forms the base), which action was facilitated by a fault or fissure in the rock.

(c) The action of the water under, and against, the basaltic tufa caused an erosion sufficient to unsettle the basaltic columns above.

(d) This removal or wasting of the pillars was hastened by a flaw or fissure between them."*

He further states that on meeting the late Mr. C. A. M'Vean, F.R.G.S., who was a native of Iona, served in the Admiralty survey of the Hebrides, and was surveyor-in-chief of Japan in 1870, he asked him, "barring the island of Staffa do you know of any cavern in this region wholly in the basalt?" Mr. M'Vean's reply was, " There is not one."

From what Prof. MacLean learned by personal explorations and examination of the basalt of this region, he was forced to the conclusion that no caverns could be formed by any of the natural processes, in the solid face of basaltic rock.

A notable fact is, that the island of Iona is visible from the innermost part of Fingal's Cave. Dun-I (the highest

*There seems to be a slight fissure running the whole length of the cave in the very apex of the arch.—D. MacC.

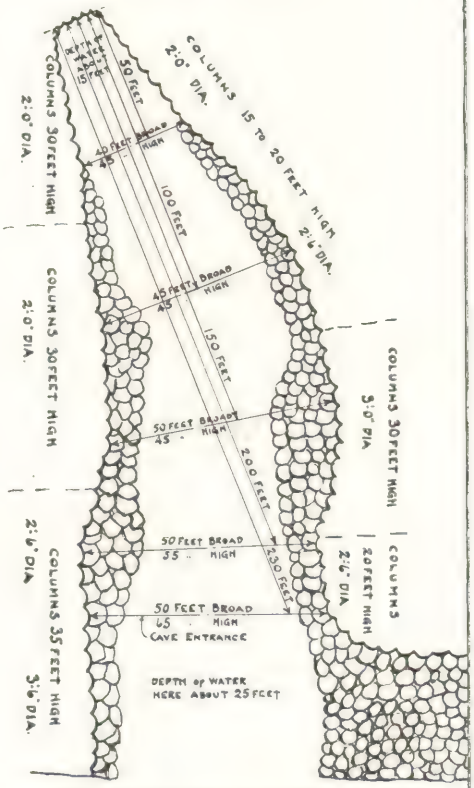
hill on Iona) lies practically in a line with the centre of the cave. The arc of a circumference with a radius of six miles, determined by the angle subtended by an opening of fifty feet at the end of a tunnel two hundred and thirty feet long, is almost infinitesimal.

This fact was put forward, at one time, in support of the theory that Staffa, in the past, had been used as a fortress to protect Iona, and that fire signals could be made to Iona from inside Fingal's Cave unseen by any outsider.

Dr. MacCulloch in his book "A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland" gives the following description of Fingal's Cave:—"It would be no less presumptuous than useless to attempt a description of the picturesque effect of that which the pencil itself is inadequate. But if this cave were even destitute of that order and symmetry, that richness arising from the multiplicity of parts combined with the greatness of dimensions and simplicity of style which it possesses: still, the prolonged length, the twilight gloom half concealing the playful and varying effects of reflected light, the echo of the measured surge as it rises and falls, the transparent green of the water and the profound fairy solitude of the scene, could not fail strongly to impress a mind gifted with any sense of beauty in art or in nature. If to these be added that peculiar sentiment with which nature most impresses us when she allows us to draw comparisons between her works and those of art, we shall be compelled to own it is not without cause that celebrity has been conferred on the cave of Fingal."

PLAN VIEW
OF
FINGAL'S CAVE, STAFFA.

NOT DRAWN TO SCALE.



HEIGHTS OF CAVE ARE FROM SEA LEVEL.
HEIGHT AND DIAMETER OF COLUMNS APPROXIMATE.
MEASUREMENTS TAKEN AT MEAN TIDE.

D. MacC.

Chapter VI

HOW FINGAL'S CAVE GOT ITS NAME

ONE explanation of how Staffa's greatest cavern received the name Fingal's Cave can be deduced from the following description of the Giant's Causeway, Ireland, in "Letters Concerning the Natural History of the Basalts of the Northern Coast of the County of Antrim, 1784," by the Rev. William Hamilton:—"The Causeway was observed by the fishermen, whose daily necessities led them thither for subsistence, to be a mole, projecting into the sea, which answered for several purposes; on closer inspection it was discovered to be built with the appearance of art and regularity somewhat resembling the works of man, but at the same time exceeding anything of the kind which had been seen: and it was found that human ingenuity and perseverance, if supported by sufficient power, might be abundantly adequate to its production. The chief defect in this analogy seems to have been the want of strength equal to the effect! but this was soon supplied in the tradition of a fanciful people, and Finn Mac Cool (whom MacPherson, the translator of Ossian's poems, has called Fingal), the celebrated hero of ancient Ireland, became the giant under whose forming hand the curious structure was erected.

It was afterwards discovered that a pile of similar pillars was placed somewhere on the opposite coast of Scotland, and as the business of latitude and longitude was not at that time very accurately ascertained, a general

confused notion prevailed that this mole was once continued across the sea and connected the Irish and Scottish coasts together."

Is it not a very reasonable supposition to make that the principal cavern in the Scottish pile of pillars should be named after this Finn Mac Cool (or Fingal), who was considered to be the great giant who had built the whole formation of Staffa and the Giant's Causeway?

In Scotland, Finn MacCool is generally known as Fingal; in Gaelic, Fionn MacCumhail, or more often merely "Fionn" (an old Gaelic word meaning fair or white). He was the central figure of the later heroic cycle of Ireland commonly called Ossianic, or Fenian, and was leader of the Fingalians or Fenians—in Gaelic, Feinne or Fiann*—a kind of standing army which was drawn from all parts of Ireland. They were kept to ward off enemies, particularly those coming from over the sea. In times of invasion Fingal collected his forces, overcame the foe, and pursued the remnants to Scotland and even further.

In times of peace they distinguished themselves as expert huntsmen.

Fingal usually resided in Almu (Allen), in Co. Kildare, where he was surrounded by some of the contingent of the Fingalians.

Unfortunately, the origin of the stories and poems connected with Fingal and his warriors is obscure, and scholars are by no means agreed on the question.

The "Annals of Ulster" state that Fingal, who was the father of Ossian (the great traditional bard of the Gaels), was lineally descended from Niah Neacht, King

*Feinne, or Fiann, is a collective noun, and is used to designate the whole company of warriors commanded by Fingal.—D. MacC.

of Leinster—that he was married first to Graine, daughter of Cormac, who was proclaimed monarch of Ireland in 254 A.D. Graine having intrigued with Diarmaid an Tuire, was repudiated by Fingal, who married her sister Aibhe, the mother of Ossian.

It is hardly credible that such a band as the Fingalians should have existed in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

A number of Sagas older in date than the Ossianic stories have been preserved which deal with events happening in the reign of Cormac Mac Airt, but none of them in its oldest shape contains any allusion whatsoever to Fingal and his warriors.

By the year 1000 A.D., Fingal was certainly connected, in the minds of the people, with the reign of Cormac Mac Airt, but the process is obscure.

In Scotland his memory is preserved in many place-names, such as Dun Fionn or Fingal's fort, a vitrified fort on the River Beauly, and Fionn Bheinn, Fingal's Mount in Strathconnan.

Irish historians of the 10th century give the date of Fingal's death as 283 A.D.

Other authorities proclaim Fingal to have been merely a poet and magician. In any case, for the last 800 years he has been a sort of national hero of the Gaelic-speaking population of Ireland, the Scottish Highlands and the Isle of Man.

The stories of Fingal and his warriors entered into the language and literature of Gaelic Scotland probably owing to the fact that for three centuries, from the 5th onwards, the language and literature of Gaelic Ireland and Gaelic Scotland were virtually the same. Later on, many new stories were no doubt composed in Scotland

regarding this hero, and Scottish place-names would naturally be introduced, but there is no authentic evidence for stating that Fingal was King of Morven, in Scotland, the title ascribed to him by MacPherson (the translator of Ossian's works). The Gaels had come from Ireland into Scotland. But after the Norsemen began their raids, intercourse between the two countries was interrupted, and this in time, under Pictish and Norse influences, led to a divergence in the speech—a process which the Reformation accentuated, so that Irish and Gaelic are now separate dialects.

The aforementioned theory of the origin of the name of the cave is opposed by several quite reliable authorities. These maintain that the name Fingal *as applied to this cave* has no connection whatsoever to Ossian's hero, but is a corruption of the Gaelic words meaning " the musical cave."

One has been emphatic enough to say that the cave " is no more associated with the Fingal of Ossian than it is with the Hector of Homer."

The Gaelic words for " musical cave " are " Uaimh Bhinn," " mh " in the substantive and " bh " in the objective have a " v " sound, and therefore " Uaimh Bhinn " is pronounced oo-a-veen.

The Gaelic for Fingal is Fionn in the nominative, but the Gaelic nouns are declinable, and the genitive of Fionn is Fhinn. The letter " F " is silent before the aspirate, Fhinn therefore becomes inn (pronounced een), this makes the pronunciation of the Gaelic for Fingal's Cave oo-a-een. It would be quite an excusable mistake for anyone to pronounce the " F " in Fhinn, which would make the pronunciation oo-a-feen. There would therefore be very little difference in pronouncing

Fingal's Cave, Staffa.

Looking out.

the Gaelic for the " musical cave " and the Gaelic name for Fingal's Cave, and Sir Joseph Banks' guides might have translated the name as the cave of Fingal, whilst the true and literal interpretation was the " musical cave."

The name of Fingal is so well known to every Gael that almost any word approaching any of its inflections in sound is readily associated with the name of the hero whose exploits are often recounted at the " ceilidh,"* a custom still observed round the peat fire of many a Highland home during the long winter evenings.

The peculiar musical sounds emitted from the cave, apart from the regular boom of the waves striking it, are probably caused by the air being trapped in a hole underwater, from which the air can be seen bubbling up on a calm day. This hole is a little below the base of the columnar structure at the inner end of the cave, and may be the mouth of a cavity or even a small cave. It gave rise, at one time, to the fanciful theory that there was a tunnel from Staffa to the Giant's Causeway in Ireland.

These musical sounds are heard much more distinctly when at a short distance from the mouth of the cave. When inside the cave the unceasing boom of the waves and the numerous echoes formed seem to drown these higher notes.

Professor Sir A. Geikie, the well-known geologist, says " there can be little doubt that this etymological explanation (of the name of Fingal's Cave) is correct. The volume of air driven into the internal cavity by the impact of the water is under the pressure sometimes of several tons to the square inch of surface. When the

*Ceilidh (pronounced Kay-lee), a social gathering round the peat fire, at which stories are told and songs are sung.—D. MacC.

pressure is suddenly relaxed by the sinking of the wave, the imprisoned air at once rushes out and in favourable chinks and passages gives rise to musical sounds as when a trumpet is blow."

The term "musical cave" might also have been applied to the cave from its resemblance to a pipe organ, if the Gaels had seen one.

As the evidence for the first theory, of the origin of the name of the cave, appears to be quite as feasible as that of the second theory, it seems more in keeping with the grandeur of this magnificent cavern that it should be associated, in name, with Fingal, the greatest of Ossian's heroes, whose name is so well known to every true Gael in the surrounding Highlands and Islands.

I beg to offer a third explanation as to how this cave received its name. I have not seen it mentioned in any other work, but it seems quite reasonable. The name may be a perpetuation of the memory of the Vikings, who, at one time, possessed the Hebrides, including Staffa, and gave the island its name. The Gaels made a distinction between the Norwegian Vikings and the Danish Vikings by calling the former Fionn-ghoill, or fair foreigners, owing to their fair hair and complexion, the latter they called Dubh-ghoill, or dark foreigners, owing to their dark hair and complexion. As it was the Norwegians who conquered the Hebrides, they evidently gave Staffa its name and were probably the original discoverers of the island's greatest cavern. That the Gaels should, therefore, bestow on this cave the name "Uaimh nam Fionn-ghall," meaning the cave of the fair foreigners, or Norwegians, is, in my opinion, most feasible. In the English translation the latter part of the name might easily have been confused with

the name Fingal, by dropping the letter " o " to facilitate pronunciation, although the word " Fionn-ghall " has no connection whatsoever with Ossian's hero.

Many of the old inhabitants of Mull call the cave, neither Uaimh Bhinn or Uaimh Fhinn, but " Uaimh Staffa " or the " cave of Staffa," meaning that it is *the* cave in the island. It is better, however, to have some specific name to distinguish it from the other caves.

Chapter VII

FAMOUS VISITORS TO FINGAL'S CAVE

SIR Walter Scott visited Staffa in the yacht of the Lighthouse Commissioners in the year 1810, while on a tour of the Scottish west coast lighthouses. In his poem "The Lord of the Isles" he gives the following fine description of Staffa and Fingal's Cave:—

"The shores of Mull on the eastward lay
And Ulva dark and Colonsay
And all the group of islets gay
That guard famed Staffa round.
Then all unknown its columns rose
Where dark and undisturbed repose
The cormorant had found
And the shy seals had quiet home,
And weltered in that wondrous dome
Where, as to shame the temples deck'd
By skill of earthly architect
Nature herself, it seemed would raise
A minster to her Maker's praise:
Not for a meaner use ascend
Her columns or her arches bend:
Nor of a theme less solemn tells
That mighty surge that ebbs and swells,
And still, between each awful pause,
From that high vault an answer draws
In varied tone prolong'd and high,
That mocks the organ's melody.
Nor doth its entrance front in vain
To old Iona's holy fane
That Nature's voice might seem to say,
'Well hast thou done, frail child of clay,
Thy humble powers that stately shrine*
Tasked high and hard—but witness mine.'"

Another famous poet to visit Staffa was William Wordsworth, who landed there in 1833. But he must have visited the cave with a crowd of people, for he says:— "We saw but surely, in that motley crowd,
Not one of us has felt the far famed sight;
How *could* we feel it? each the others blight,
Hurried and hurrying, volatile and loud."

*Iona Cathedral.

A Heavy Sea Breaking at the Bending Columns, Staffa.

However, he remained behind for a few minutes after the crowd had retreated, and voiced his sentiments thus :—

" Thanks for the lessons of this spot—fit school
For the presumptuous thoughts that would assign
Mechanic laws to agency divine:
And measuring heaven by earth would overrule
Infinite power. The pillared vestibule
Expanding yet precise, the roof embowed
Might seem designed to humble man, when proved
Of his best workmanship by plan and tool.
Down bearing with his whole Atlantic weight
Of tide and tempest on the Structure's base,
And flashing to that Structure's topmost height
Ocean has proved its strength, and of its grace
In calms is conscious finding for his freight
Of softest music some responsive place.
O, for those motions only that invite
The Ghost of Fingal to his tuneful cave
By the breeze entered, and wave after wave
Softly embosoming the timid light!
And by one Votary who at will might stand
Gazing, and take into his mind and heart,
With undistracted reverence, the effect
Of these proportions where the Almighty Hand
That made the world, the Sovereign Architect,
Had deigned to work as if in human Art."

Sir Robert Peel, after a visit to Fingal's Cave, wrote: " I have seen the temple not made with hands and have felt the majestic swell of the ocean, the pulsation of the great Atlantic beating in its innermost sanctuary, and swelling a note of praise nobler far than ever pealed from human organ."

Mendelssohn, the famous composer, visited Staffa in 1829 and was so impressed by Fingal's Cave that he wrote an overture called " Fingal's Cave." There is a letter of his from the Hebrides which contains the first twenty bars of the Overture. It was not composed, however, until the following year, during his stay in Italy, when he called it the overture to the " Solitary Island." A musical critic has described this wondrous work as " one of the most ideal pieces of tone painting in the musical

art." The atmosphere is unmistakeable. One can note the restless theme with which the Overture opens, reminiscent of the surging waves. The effective writing for the wood wind is described by Wagner as " rising above the other instruments, wailing like sea winds through the caves."

In the year 1847 Queen Victoria and Prince Albert landed on Staffa from their yacht. In " Leaves from the Manual of Our Life in the Highlands " her impressions are recorded:—" At three we anchored close before Staffa and immediately got into the barge with Charles, the children and the rest of our people, and rowed towards the cave. As we rounded the point the wonderful Basaltic formation came in sight. The appearance it presented was most extraordinary: and when we turned the corner to go into the renowned Fingal's Cave the effect was splendid, like a great entrance into a vaulted hall, it looked almost awful as we entered and the barge heaved up and down in the swell of the sea."

In a " Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., in 1773," Boswell says:—" We saw the island of Staffa at no very great distance, but could not land upon it, the surge was so high on its rocky coast."

A painting of Fingal's Cave, Staffa, by J. M. Turner, R.A., the famous artist, was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1832. It now hangs in the Lennox Gallery, New York, U.S.A.

This cave also forms the subject of a rather unusual method of picture painting, executed on the walls of one of the public rooms in the Argyle Hotel, Iona. These pictures, one 6 ft. by 3 ft. showing the exterior of the cave, and one 3 ft. by 2ft. 6 ins. looking out of the cave, were painted directly on to the bare wall surface by an artist of the name of James Aitken, about forty-five years ago.

Chapter VIII

FLORA AND FAUNA

THE surface of Staffa is clothed with a rich pasturage but the plant life calls for no special mention, only common flowers are found here, such as Primroses, Hyacinths, Daisies and Buttercups, but during the early summer a large part of the surface of the island is carpeted so thickly with the two latter flowers that the expanse of colour is extremely beautiful.

There are no trees on the island, the largest plants being a few bramble bushes on the sheltered (eastern) side.

Dr. J. Leyden in "A Tour of the Highlands in 1800" states, "although now only used for grazing cattle it (Staffa) formerly produced a considerable quantity of corn."

During the nesting season practically all kinds of sea birds make their home here, including Razorbills, Guillemots, Stormy Petrels, Wild Ducks and numerous types of Gulls, also that very interesting seabird, the Puffin or Sea Parrot. The local name for Puffin is Seamas Ruadh (Gaelic for Red Jimmie). They must be numbered among the quaintest of all British birds, with their upright mode of walking and their large highly coloured beaks (red, yellow and blue). Many an hour I have spent among these feathered comedians, watching their habits and exploring their nests. If unmolested they will come within two feet of a human being, and their quaint method of walking forward, halting, and

turning sideways, before surveying a person, with their cold stony stare can hardly fail to raise a smile. Their comical ways seem to be similar to the Penguins of the Antarctic, only that the Puffins are almost always silent. When among them I was reminded of the description of the Penguins by Scott, Shackleton and Ponting.

Puffins fly in a very swift and undeviating line of flight, their wings vibrating with insect-like rapidity: their red legs and feet sticking out behind, wide spread, in a most ungraceful fashion. They swoop past close along the face of the cliff, then, swooping out seawards, they make a circuit, and so pass and repass, again and again, making an ariel Puffin procession. They always seem to keep flying over the sea and very seldom come over the land.

Their nests are built in holes cut out of the soil at the top of the cliffs, where they lay their solitarry white egg, which seems to get soiled with the surrounding earth. These holes may reach up to six feet in depth. It has been said that Puffins cannot excavate holes of this depth, but chase rabbits out of their burrows and use them. This, however, is not the case on Staffa, as, according to the neighbouring islanders, there never have been rabbits on the island.

At first I wished to kill one of these Puffins and have it stuffed, to keep as a souvenir, but after thinking the matter over I decided that in most cases of wild bird life it is the glorious freedom and natural actions which appeal to the spectator, just as much as any special appearance the birds may possess, and having since seen stuffed Puffins I do not regret my decision to leave them alone, as a dead, stone-like Puffin in a glass case can give no one any idea of the pleasure it is to observe these same birds in life.

The Bending Columns, Staffa.

Another type of bird worth watching is the Guillemots. As their eggs were laid on narrow ledges of rock at the entrance to MacKinnon's Cave, the best method I found for observing them was to lie at the top of the cliffs on one side of the cave and, through a good telescope, watch them on the opposite cliffs only a few hundred feet away. The Guillemots build no nest, but lay their one very large (in comparison with the size of the bird) egg on the bare surface of the rocky ledge. Naturalists say that the reason these eggs do not roll off when the bird rises suddenly is owing to their shape, which, being very blunt at one end and very sharp at the other, merely turn round on their axis when disturbed. The eggs are of a very light shade of green, sometimes white, and blotched and streaked with dark lines in a very peculiar manner.

A number of Stormy Petrels on Staffa make their nests among the heaps of stones, caused by the crumbling of the remaining ruins of habitation, and at night time can be heard making a very peculiar noise, sometimes a purring sound and sometimes a cooing sound. It has been remarked of these birds that they hatch their young by sitting on the ground about six inches from their solitary egg and, turning their heads towards it, make this peculiar sound day and night till it is hatched. The Gaelic name for Stormy Petrel is Gur-le-gug,—meaning, hatch with a coo. In any case, when the stones are lifted the bird is usually found cowering a few inches away from its egg. When handled, these Petrels eject a quantity of dark yellow oil from their bills.

One very beautiful nest found on Staffa is that of the Eider Duck, lined with eider down which the duck plucks from her own breast. This down is about two inches

thick, and when the bird leaves the nest she pulls part of the down over the eggs, which helps to keep them warm and also hides them from any birds or beings likely to damage them.

One very noticeable feature about the Sea Birds on Staffa is that each type of bird seems to have its own particular part of the island for nesting purposes, and very rarely will two different kinds be found nesting together. The Guillemots and Razorbills have their own quarters at MacKinnon's Cave, the Cormorants in Cormorants' and Clamshell Caves, the Gulls on the west side of the island and the Puffins at the north end, other birds having their own secluded retreats.

Common and grey seals are quite numerous in the vicinity and in good weather may be seen basking on the rocks. When angered or hungry, seals utter a peculiar sound, half bark and half moan, a very disquieting sound when first heard on a lonely island.

Their sense of smell is acute, also their hearing, although their organs of hearing are hidden beneath the skin. It is alleged by the local fishermen, in fact, in most parts of the Highlands, that musical sounds attract and fascinate them. Sir Walter Scott mentions this fact in his " Lord of the Isles."

If one is very careful occasional Otters may be seen on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, but they seem to be extremely sensitive to any sounds.

Very remunerative Lobster fishing is carried on in the surrounding waters, and as to the edible qualities of the lobsters, crabs, dulce, whelks and other marine produce of Staffa, I can personally testify.

Chapter IX

INHABITANTS

ALTHOUGH Staffa is now uninhabited and has been for many years, it was not always so.

U. Von Troil (one of Sir Joseph Banks' companions when he visited Staffa in 1772) states in his "Letters on Iceland," when describing Staffa, "There is only one hut, which is occupied by a peasant who attends some cattle that pasture there. To testify his joy for our arrival he sang all night over in the Erse language, which we did not understand. He regaled us with fish and milk."

Sir Joseph Banks erected a tent on Staffa, but the lone inhabitant pressed him so strongly to spend the night in his hut that he left his companions in the tent and slept in the hut. On leaving the hut next morning he discovered he had acquired a colony of vermin. He mentioned the circumstances to his host in terms of mild reproach. But the latter, who was touched to the quick, straightened himself up and, assuming a tone of consequence, retorted haughtily and harshly that it was Sir Joseph himself who had imported the vermin into his island and adding that he had better have left them in England.

At the time of Banks' visit the island belonged to a Mr. Lauchlan Mac Quarrie.

The Bishop of Londonderry, who visited Staffa several years after Banks, found the above-mentioned herdsman still occupying the island. The Bishop, being unable to

speak Gaelic, told one of his guides to ask the

> "Lone Herdsman of the Hebride Isles
> Plac'd far amid the melancholy main,"

what he most wanted. The answer was simple and moderate, "a razor and some soap." The worthy Prelate gave him a purse containing ten guineas, and later sent three razors and several pounds of soap, which made the poor fellow pity and despise the rest of the world till his presents were worn out and expended.

It is said that when the above reverend visitor first beheld Fingal's Cave he was so impressed by its sublimity that he fell on his knees and prayed.

When in September, 1784, B. Faujas de Saint Fond, the French geologist, visited Staffa the population numbered sixteen persons. Faujas was the first geologist to visit Staffa and describe it as a volcanic island. He says in "A Journey to the Hebrides in 1784," "The total population at the time when I visited it, consisted of two families who lived apart in two huts, constructed of unhewn blocks of basalt roofed over with sods, and who amounted, men, women and children, to the number of sixteen persons. Belonging to these were eight cows, one bull, twelve sheep, two horses, one pig, two dogs, one cock and eight hens." He further states, "These huts get no light except from the door, which was only three feet high, and from the chimney, which consisted of a pyramidical opening in the middle of the hut. . . . Only on the highest part is there a flat piece of ground covered with a poor dry turf, alongside of which is a corner of ground newly broken up, where a little oats and a few potatoes are raised. For firing, the inhabitants are obliged to make use of a bad turf, which they lift in the summer season in order to dry it. It

Packed Columnar Formation in "The Herdsman," Staffa.

is not a peat since it consists simply of fibrous roots of common grasses, intermixed with earth. Nothing worse in the way of fuel could be used, but here necessity reigns with absolute sway.

The whole of the island belongs to Colonel Charles Camble of Cambletown, in Cantyre. It is let at the rent of twelve pounds sterling on account probably of its fishery, for its territorial value ought to be considered as nothing."

Describing his reception on Staffa, Faujas says, " The women and children of the two families did not fail to come to us, and invited us to their habitations; but being already informed of their excessive dirt, we were inflexible; and preferred on good ground to receive their civilities and their compliments in the open air.

Finding that it was impossible to prevail with us by the most friendly gestures, they resolved to do us the honours on the small esplanade in front of their dwellings.

The men, women and children, with much gravity, first formed themselves in a large circle in which they placed us and our seamen. Then one of the women, disgustingly ugly and dirty, brought out a large wooden bowl filled with milk, with which she placed herself in the centre of the circle. She viewed us all round with attention, and immediately came up to me, and pronouncing some words, presented the bowl with a sort of courtesy. I held out my hands to receive it, but she drank some of it before she gave it to me. I followed her example and passed the vessel to my neighbour, William Thornton; he gave it to Mr. MacDonald and so on from hand to hand, or more properly from mouth to mouth, till every person had tasted of it. Having made our acknowledgements for

this kindness, they immediately appointed two guides to accompany us to Fingal's Cave and all the remarkable places of this small isle."

Abraham Mills, a vulcanist, who visited Staffa in 1788, says:—"There were three houses (5th July, 1788) uninhabited, and barley, oats, flax and potatoes growing near the centre of the island, and good grass in several parts. When the crops are ripe, labourers are sent to gather them in; after which thirty head of cattle are sent to winter on the island, which, with a solitary herdsman to attend them, continue till the seed time the ensuing spring."

In the old (Sinclair's) "Statistical Account of Scotland," 1795, the Rev. Arch. MacArthur states—"In the mouth of Lochnankell lie the islands of Ulva, Gometra, Little Colonsay and Staffa, all of which are inhabited."

Prof. T. Garnett who visited Staffa during the month of July, 1798, says in "A Tour Through the Highlands of Scotland," "Near the middle of the island we found two wretched huts, built with fragments of basaltic pillars and rude pieces of lava; one of these served as the habitation of a herd and his family, who take care of the cattle that feed on the island; the other is used as a barn or cow-house. Upon the side of a hillock near the hut we sat down and partook of our provisions, and the herd's wife presented us with some milk in a large wooden bowl so heavy that we could scarcely life it to our mouths; they had no smaller vessels, nor spoons. Indeed, their manner of life is extremely simple, their food consisting chiefly of milk and potatoes with, now and then, a little fish. There being no wood on the island the only fuel used by these poor people is the sods of earth which they carefully dry.

This family resided here both winter and summer for three years, but in winter their situation was frequently very unpleasant; for during storms the waves beat so violently against the island that the very house was shaken, though situated in the middle of it; indeed, the concussion was often so great that the pot which hung over the fire partook of it and was made to vibrate.* This so much alarmed the poor inhabitants one very stormy winter that they determined to leave the island the first favourable opportunity, for they believed that nothing but an evil spirit could have rocked it in that manner. Since that time they have resided here only during the summer season and even at this time of the year (July) their situation is far from enviable, for it is impossible to keep a boat in the bay on account of the surf."

Dr. J. Leyden, the Scottish poet and friend of Sir Walter Scott, who visited Staffa in 1800, makes no mention of the inhabitants, but says that he saw three deer which had been placed on the island and which seemed perfectly tame.

There were no inhabitants during the visits of Dr. John MacCulloch, the geologist, between the years of 1811 and 1821, and a Mr. B. Botfield, F.R.S., who visited Staffa during the summer of 1829 describes the island as being uninhabited. The Rev. D. MacArthur, writing in September, 1843, in "The New Statistical Account of Scotland," says:—"Staffa is uninhabited," but Prof.

*Some of Faujas' companions who were compelled to spend two nights on Staffa owing to the storm declared that "the sea broke upon the island with such impetuosity, and rushed into the caves with such noise that the hut shook to its *foundations, and they could get no sleep.*"

MacLean in his "Report on Fingal's Cave, 1887," states:—

"A few years ago a shepherd and his family were persuaded to go on the isle, but they soon beseeched to be removed, because the hollow roar made by the sea through the caverns during times of storms sounded so dismally that they became terrified. To a superstitious people there would be something more than natural forces in the fetch of the ocean which bursts through these pillared portals with a sound as of artillery."

At the present time the only sign of habitation is one pile of ruins, situated in a sheltered hollow in the island, which still retains a comparatively well-built Gothic arched window. These ruins are thirty-five feet long by seventeen feet broad, the highest part of the remaining walls (which are eighteen inches thick) is about eight feet from the ground. The arched window is four feet six inches from sill to apex of arch, by two feet six inches broad. The back window is four feet six inches high by two feet broad. There is a three feet by three feet by nine inch recess, with lintel over, in the eastern wall.

The Gothic arched window in these ruins seems to be rather elaborate workmanship for a shepherd's house; it is also noticeable that the wall is recessed in way of this window, the recess being five feet wide and six inches deep. There is also a similar recess in this wall, to the east of the doorway, and in this recess there appears to be the sill of another window, although this sill has had stones piled on it by some well-meaning visitor who probably wished to retard the decay of these walls. This building has been compared to St. Oran's Chapel, in the neighbouring island of Iona, which is twenty-nine feet long by fifteen feet broad, but the architecture in

The Only Sign of Habitation on Staffa, 1922.

the arched window of the Staffa building is very crude compared with the Norman doorway in St. Oran's Chapel, Iona.

The building on Staffa is constructed of square blocks of basalt with a centre core of rubble; the threshold-stone of the doorway consists of a micaceous sandstone, obtained probably in Mull.

These ruins were brought to the notice of the public by Lord Guthrie and Mr. Alex. Ritchie, Iona, who visited Staffa and examined them during the summer of 1914, but they must have previously been examined (although perhaps not in a detailed manner) by the officers of H.M. Government Ordnance Survey when this part of the island was surveyed in 1875. The ruins are clearly indicated in the Scottish survey map, Sheet 93 (scale, six inches to one mile).

In the year 1889 the writer's father and his companion erected a substantial wooden bothy within these walls for their own use while spending their annual sojourn, which they did for many years, also for the use of anyone requiring shelter while on the island. This bothy, with annual repairs, withstood the storms of summer and winter for about twenty years, till some thoughtless traveller left the door unlatched, the result being that the first gale of wind tore the roof off, the remaining parts were gradually blown down, and can be found widely scattered over the island.

The above mentioned ruins, with their arched window, etc., are considered by several authorities to be the remains of an ancient Chapel, probably of the thirteenth or fourteenth century date. Staffa, with its lofty cliffs, was no doubt a more secure place of retreat than Iona during troublous times on the west of Scotland.

If these ruins are ancient it is strange that keen observers like Faujas, Dr. MacCulloch and Abraham Mills have not made mention of them, as on a desolate island like this a Gothic arched window would be likely to attract anyone's attention.

I was informed by Mr. J. MacCormick, F.S.A.Scot., an authority on Mull and the surrounding islands, that arched windows have been built in houses in Mull where no stones of sufficient length for lintels were obtainable, but, although the voussoirs, or arch stones, are very crude, this does not appear to be the reason for the arched window on Staffa, as there are two lintels fitted in other parts of these ruins, one of which is over three feet long.

There is a small bay near these ruins where the gradient is the most accessible to the top of the island, and where there are more loose stones than at any other part. It is probable, therefore, that this was the place where the building stones were obtained.

It is to be hoped that some Society may be induced to undertake the work of excavation (which may throw some light on its history) as well as of preserving what may probably be a relic of Mediaeval Christianity on this famous island.

Not many yards from these ruins there are the remains of what was probably a small dwelling-house, or perhaps a monastic cell, as the fragments of wall remaining have the stones built together in quite workmanlike manner.

There are also the remains of what appear to have been three sheep fanks, as their size seems to be in excess of any dwelling-house likely to have been built on Staffa. They are approximately forty feet by thirty feet. The stones used for these fanks, however, may have been the

stones used in the building of the houses referred to by Faujas.

The last occasion on which Staffa was occupied by a single inhabitant was, probably, during the summer of 1897, when the writer's father was forced to spend two nights alone on the island. This was caused by his companion, who had sailed to Gometra, being unable to return owing to inclement weather.

The only sign of domesticated life now seen on Staffa is a flock of sheep belonging to the neighbouring islanders. For some time cattle were grazed, but were withdrawn a number of years ago, as it was found that the pasture was more suitable for sheep, also, the ferrying difficulties were greater in the case of cattle.

The nearest human beings to Staffa at the present time are those on the island of Gometra, about four miles distant, on which island there are eight dwelling-houses, having forty inhabitants.

Chapter X

CONCLUSION

DURING our sojourn on Staffa we made our home in the east end of the ruins of the ancient chapel mentioned in the previous chapter, our beds being insulated from the ground by a waterproof sheet spread across a few weather-worn planks of wood which we found on the island. For a roof we stretched a tarpaulin across from wall to wall, carrying the surplus part down over the exposed inner end, this acting as a fourth wall. The whole was secured with ropes and weighted down with stones, but, although situated in a sheltered part of the island, our roof required frequent inspections during the night when a strong sou'-wester was blowing, this rather unpleasant task being usually performed in pitch darkness.

On two occasions we had the opportunity of viewing Staffa bathed in the silvery beams of the moon. The dark forbidding headlands could be seen jutting out into the glittering sea, and, to the east, the faint blue and purple outlines of the mountains of Mull. Far to the west appeared the welcome flashes of Skerryvore lighthouse. The solitude and isolation of our "island home" was impressed upon each of us much more strongly by the clear moonlight, than by the more usual inky darkness. Staffa by moonlight is a scene never likely to be forgotten by anyone fortunate enough to witness it.

To be awakened in the morning by the sound of the waves crashing against the cliffs and the gulls screaming overhead; to go out and kindle the morning fire in bright

Atlantic Swell Breaking on Staffa.

sunshine from a blue, cloudless sky, and inhale ozone-laden winds which had travelled miles of the broad Atlantic without obstruction, made one feel that life was really worth living; the view obtained in all directions helped to increase the feeling of invigoration.

Owing to lack of light and space in our shelter we usually took our meals " al fresco."

The scenery surrounding Staffa is extremely grand and interesting. To the north, on a clear day, may be seen the islands of Rum, Eigg, Skye and others of the Inner Hebrides. To the east lie the mountainous island of Mull (with Ben More towering to a height of 3169 feet) and the smaller islands of Gometra, Ulva, Little Colonsay and Inch Kenneth. Ulva was the home of the grand-parents and father of Dr. Livingstone, the African explorer, while Inch Kenneth was, in the past, one of Iona's dependent isles, and still contains the ruins of a very ancient chapel. The low-lying ridge of the Ross of Mull appears to the south-east, and still further off the hills of Jura and Islay.

To the south lies the sacred island of Iona with its Cathedral and Royal burying-ground, which contains the graves of sixty Scottish, Irish and Norwegian Kings, probably one of the most famous islands in Europe. From south to west stretches the unbroken horizon line of the Atlantic, till slightly north of due west appear the islands of Tiree and Coll. South of the former lies the famous Skerryvore lighthouse (first lighted in 1844), the flashes of which can be seen clearly from Staffa with the naked eye on a good night. Even at the present day this lighthouse is considered to be one of the engineering wonders of the world, being built on a very small, sea-swept rock, and exposed on all sides to the full fury of

the Atlantic, the nearest land being Tiree, about ten miles distant.

South of Iona lies another famous lighthouse, namely, Dhu-Heartach (first lighted in 1872). This is also a very exposed light, being situated on a small rock fifteen miles south-west of Mull (the nearest land). Dhu-Heartach rock forms the outermost point of the Torran rocks, a dangerous reef which should be well known to the readers of R. L. Stevenson's "Kidnapped," as it was on this reef that David Balfour was wrecked.

Skerryvore Lighthouse was designed by Mr. Alan Stevenson, uncle of R. L. Stevenson, and Dhu-Heartach was designed by Messrs. T. and D. S. Stevenson, his father and another uncle.

Close to Staffa, to the north-west, stretches for about four miles a number of small islands called the Treshnish Islands. On one of these (called Cairnburg Mor) there stands the remains of a fort said to have been built by the MacLeans of Duart on the site of a still older fort dating from the time of the Norse possessions in the Hebrides.

Another of these islands, which has a broad flat rim with a small rounded hill in the centre, is called the "Dutchman's cap," but it is not known how it received this name, as its shape resembles a Sombrero much more than a Dutchman's cap. The correct, though less often used, name for this island is Baca, derived from the Norse words "bak," meaning a back, or hump, and "ey," meaning island; hence, "bak-ey," hump island, the letter "a" being substituted for "ey," as in the name Staffa. The Gaels have added the adjective Mor (Gaelic for great or big), thus making this name Baca Mor (the big, hump island) to distinguish it from a small islet nearby

which they have named Baca Beag, meaning small, hump island. The latter name shows that the Gaels did not know the mean of the word " Baca," as the small island has no hump.

Baca Mor owes its peculiar form to pre-Glacial marine erosion; the brim marks the level formerly reached by the waves; the crown is the island that then alone stood above the sea. In addition to the above three islands there are Cairnburg Beag, Fladda and Lunga.

Far beyond the Treshnish Islands, on a clear day, appear the faint outlines of Barra and Uist, two of the Outer Hebrides.

On the coast of Mull, opposite Staffa, can be seen the ruins of Castle Dare of William Black's novel " MacLeod of Dare." The scenes of the novel are laid in the surrounding district. While engaged on the writing of his novel, Mr. Black spent two days on Staffa with the writer's father and his companion, which enabled him to obtain a bird's eye view of the scenes of his story. He described Staffa as an Author's Utopia, with nothing to disturb him but the sound of the waves.

Under various conditions of the weather, magnificent seascapes can be seen from the top of Staffa, but probably the most beautiful is sunset in the Atlantic. The heavy ground swell can be seen heaving in from the west with, here and there, a foaming roller, and as the sun sinks like a ball of fire into the sea it tinges the whole scene with gold, giving a spectacle which even the most biased could not help admiring.

Every evening after tea and wash-up, our company of three used to climb to the west side of the island and there enjoy our evening smoke, watching the seabirds and seals, which crowded the sea on a calm evening, disporting

themselves in the water till growing darkness caused them to disperse. We then watched for the light being lit on Skerryvore as, when it appeared, we knew it was time for us to " turn in."

The following lines by W. Winter fully describe the after-thoughts of one who has spent a holiday on Staffa :—

" Gone the isle and distant far
All its loves and glories are;
Yet forever in my mind,
Still will sigh the wand'ring wind,
And the music of the seas,
'Mid the lone Hebrides."

THE END

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